

Listening and Responding

CHAPTER 5

Listening and Responding

Beth, do you have my opener to the garage? I can't find it and I have to take the car or I'll be late for class."

"No, but it doesn't matter because . . ."

"I can't believe it. I was sure I left it here on the counter last night."

"Bart, it's okay . . ."

"It just figures. Just because I'm in a hurry, I can't find it."

"Bart, I've been trying to tell you, the . . ."

Listening and Responding

“I swear I put it here on the counter. Did you stuff it in a drawer or move it when you were cleaning the kitchen or something?”

“Bart, chill out. The door’s . . .”

“Chill out?! If I’m late, I won’t be able to do my presentation and it’s worth 50 percent of the course grade! I won’t pass the class and I need at least a B to get accepted into the major. Beth, this is a very big deal.”

“Bart, I’ve been trying to tell you . . .”

Listening and Responding

“Oh sure—I just go in to the professor’s office and say, ‘By the way, the reason I wasn’t in class was that I couldn’t find the garage door opener. Can I please do my presentation tomorrow?’ I’ll sound like a slacker who wasn’t ready. There’s no way he’ll buy that argument even though it’s true.”

“Bart, listen!!! I’ve been trying to tell you—I don’t know where your opener is, but I went out this morning and knew you would be leaving soon so I left the door open for you.”

“Geez, Beth, why didn’t you tell me?”

What Is Listening?

People sometimes make the mistake of thinking listening and hearing are the same thing, but they're not. Hearing is a physiological process, whereas listening is a cognitive process. In other words, listening occurs only when we choose to attach meaning to what we hear.

Importance of Listening

Listening is important for effective communication because 50 percent or more of the time we spend communicating is spent listening (Janusik & Wolvin, 2006). Although most of us have spent a great deal of time learning to read and write, fewer than 2 percent of us have had any formal listening training (Listening Factoid, 2003).

According to research by the International Listening Association, even when we try to listen carefully, most of us remember only about 50 percent of what we hear shortly after hearing it and only about 20 percent two days later.

Types of Listening

1. **Appreciative Listening:** *Listening for enjoyment.*
2. **Discriminative Listening:** *Listening to understand the meaning of a message.*
3. **Comprehensive Listening:** *Listening to learn or remember.*
4. **Empathic Listening:** *Listening to understand the speakers feelings about the message.*
5. **Critical Listening:** *Listening to evaluate the truthfulness or honesty of a message.*

Steps in the Listening Process

Listening is a complex process made up of five steps. These steps are

(a) attending,

(b) understanding,

(c) remembering,

(d) evaluating,

(e) responding to the message.

Steps in the Listening Process:

a. Attending

Attending the process of focusing on what a speaker is saying regardless of the potential distractions of other competing stimuli.

1. Get physically ready to listen.
2. Resist mental distractions while you listen.
3. Resist interrupting others.
4. Hear a person out before you react.
5. Observe nonverbal cues.

Steps in the Listening Process:

b. Understanding

Decoding a message accurately to reflect the meaning intended by the speaker. We can improve our understanding by asking questions, paraphrasing the message, and empathizing with the speaker.

1. Ask questions to gain additional information.

2. Paraphrase the message to check your understanding.

3. Empathize with the speaker.

☐ **Empathic Responsiveness:** *experiencing an emotional response parallel to, and as a result observing, another person's actual or anticipated display of emotion.*

☐ **Perspective Taking:** *imagining yourself in the place of another; the most common form of empathizing.*

4. Sympathetic Responsiveness: *Feeling concern, compassion, or sorrow for another because of the other's situation or plight.*

Skill	Use	Procedure	Example
A response that conveys your understanding of another person's message.	To increase listening efficiency; to avoid message confusion; to discover the speaker's motivation.	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Listen carefully to the message.2. Notice what images and feelings you have experienced from this message.3. Determine what the message means to you.4. Create a message that conveys these images or feelings.	Grace says, "At two minutes to five, the boss gave me three letters that had to be in the mail that evening!" Bonita replies, "If I understand, you were really resentful that your boss dumped important work on you right before quitting time when she knows you have to pick up the baby at day care."

Provide an appropriate question and paraphrase for each of these statements. To get you started, look at this model:

Example: "It's Dionne's birthday, and I've planned a big evening. Sometimes I think Dionne believes I take her for granted—well, after tonight she'll know I think she's something special!"

Question: "What specific things do you have planned?"

Paraphrase: "If I'm understanding you, you're really proud that you've planned a night that's going to be a lot more elaborate than what Dionne expects on her birthday."

1. Luis: "It was just another mind-numbing class. I keep thinking one of these days Professor Romero will get excited about something. He is a real bore!"
2. Angie: "Everyone seems to be raving about the new reality show on Channel 5 last night, but I didn't see it. You know, I don't watch the boob tube."
3. Kaelin: "I don't know if it's me or Mom, but lately she and I just aren't getting along."
4. Aileen: "I've got a report due at work and a paper due in management class. On top of that, it's my sister's birthday, and so far I haven't even had time to get her anything. Tomorrow's going to be a disaster."



Steps in the Listening Process:

C: Remembering

Remembering is being able to retain information and recall it when needed. Three techniques that can help you improve your ability to remember information are repeating, constructing mnemonics, and taking notes.

1. **Repeat the information.**
2. **Construct mnemonics.** (PSBKG)
3. **Take notes.**

Steps in the Listening Process:

D. Evaluating

The fourth listening process is to evaluate or critically analyze what has been said. **Evaluation** is critically analyzing what you have heard to determine its truthfulness. To evaluate a message, you must learn to separate statements of fact from statements based on inferences. **Factual statements** are those whose accuracy can be verified as true. **Inferences** are conjectures which may be based on facts or observations.

Once you've determined what in the message is being offered as fact and what is being offered as inference, you need to:

- (1) analyze the “facts” to determine if they are true and;
- (2) test the inferences to determine whether they are valid.

Steps in the Listening Process:

E. Responding

At times, to be truthful and ethical, we will need to disagree with someone or provide negative feedback or a negative critique. When we respond to a friend or family member who appears emotionally upset, respond to a work-group colleague's ideas, or respond to a public speech by critiquing it, we need to respond supportively. supportive messages are *comforting statements that have a goal to reassure, bolster, encourage, soothe, console, or cheer up*.

1. Guidelines for responses that offer emotional support: Research suggests several key characteristics of **supportive messages** in interpersonal settings (Burleson, 2003, pp. 565–568). The following guidelines are based on this research:

- *Clearly state that your aim is to help.*

Example: “I’d like to help you, what can I do?”

Guidelines for responses that offer emotional support:

- *Express acceptance or affection; do not condemn or criticize.*

Example: “I understand that you just can’t seem to accept this.”

- *Demonstrate care, concern, and interest in the other’s situation; do not give a lengthy recount of a similar situation.*

Example: “What are you planning to do now?” Or “Gosh, tell me more; what happened then?”

- *Indicate that you are available to listen and support the other without intruding.*

Example: “I know we’ve not been that close, but sometimes it helps to have someone to listen, and I’d like to do that for you.”

- *State that you are an ally.*

Example: “I’m with you on this.” Or “Well, I’m on your side; this isn’t right.”

Guidelines for responses that offer emotional support:

-
- *Acknowledge the other's feelings and situation as well as expressing your sincere sympathy; do not condemn or criticize the other's behavior or feelings.*

Example: "I'm so sorry to see you feeling so bad; I can see that you're devastated by what has happened."

- *Assure the other that what he or she is feeling is legitimate; do not tell the other how to feel or to ignore his or her feelings.*

Example: "With what has happened to you, you have a right to be angry."

- *Use prompting comments to encourage the other to elaborate on his or her story.*

Example: "Uh-huh," "yeah," or "I see. How did you feel about that?" Or "What happened before that? Can you elaborate?"

Steps in the Listening Process:

E. Responding

2. Guidelines for responses that demonstrate respect when disagreeing or critiquing others. the following guidelines can help you demonstrate that you respect the person and that your goal is to provide the person with your point of view.

- *Use “I” language so that you clearly own the comments you are making and do not ascribe them to others.*

Example: “Carla, I really like the way you cited the reference for your opening quotation.”

- *Use specific language and specific examples to point out areas of disagreement and areas for improvement.*

Example: “I apologize, but I can’t agree to that deadline or to another meeting about this project until I have had a chance to see the entire presentation. I’d suggest that by Monday at 10:00 a.m. each of us e-mails other team members a copy of the report section we are drafting. Then let’s have a short meeting right after class to see if we need to meet again and, if so, to set a time.”

2. Guidelines for responses that demonstrate respect when disagreeing or critiquing others.

- *Find a point to agree with or something positive to say before expressing your disagreement or offering a negative critique.*

Example: “I really appreciate what you had to say on this topic. But it was hard for me to follow your argument, and I think that if you had used transitional statements, they could have helped me understand your points better.”

In this course, you may be asked to respond to a speech given by one of your classmates. If so, you will want to remember that your goal is to be supportive, honest, and helpful. A good critique will address three topics: the content of the speech, the structure of the speech, and the delivery of the speech.

- When critiquing the content, you can comment on the appropriateness of the speech for that particular audience and the use of facts and inferences; you can also analyze the logic of the arguments and the evidence used to support ideas.
- When critiquing structure, you can focus on the introduction, the use of transitions, the choice of organizational pattern, and the concluding remarks.
- When critiquing delivery, you can comment on how the speaker used voice and gesture, whether the tone was appropriately conversational or formal, and how effectively the speaker used visual aids such as PowerPoint slides.

Examples of effective and ineffective speech critiques

	Ineffective critique	Effective critique
Content	"The sources you cited are old and no longer represent current thinking on the topic."	"I noticed you relied heavily on Johnson's 1969 essay about global warming. For me, your argument would be more compelling if you were to cite research that has been published in the last five years."
Structure	"You were really hard to follow."	"I really appreciate what you had to say on this topic. I would have been able to follow your main points better if I had heard clear transitions between each one. Transitions would have helped me notice the switch from one topic to the next."
Delivery	"You talk too fast!"	"I was fascinated by the evidence you offered to support the first main point. It would have been even more compelling for me if you were to slow down while explaining that information. That would give me time to understand the material more fully before we moved on to the next main point."

A summary of the five aspects of listening

ATTENDING

The process of focusing on what a speaker is saying regardless of competing stimuli that are potential distractions.

Good listeners

Good listeners attend to important information.

They

- ready themselves physically and mentally
- listen objectively regardless of emotional involvement
- listen differently depending on situations

UNDERSTANDING

The process of decoding a message accurately to reflect the meaning intended by the speaker.

Good listeners assign appropriate meaning to what is said. They

- seek out apparent purpose, main points, and supporting information
- ask mental questions to anticipate information
- silently paraphrase to solidify understanding
- seek out subtle meanings based on nonverbal cues

REMEMBERING

The process of being able to retain information and recall it when needed.

Good listeners mentally work to retain what has been said. They

- repeat key information
- mentally create mnemonics for lists of words and ideas
- take notes

ATTENDING

Poor listeners

Poor listeners may not hear what a person is saying because of day-dreaming or distractions.

They

- fidget in their chairs, look out the window, and let their minds wander
- visibly react to emotional language
- listen the same way regardless of the type of material

UNDERSTANDING

Poor listeners hear what is said but are either unable to understand or assign different meaning to the words. They

- ignore the way information is organized
- fail to anticipate coming information
- seldom or never mentally review information
- ignore nonverbal cues

REMEMBERING

Poor listeners rely on a single hearing to retain what has been said.

They

- assume they will remember
- seldom single out any information as especially important
- rely on memory alone

EVALUATING

The process of critically analyzing what you have heard to determine its truthfulness.

RESPONDING SUPPORTIVELY

The process of confirming the speaker's feelings and, when disagreeing or critiquing, demonstrating respect for the speaker

Good listeners

Good listeners assess the accuracy, truthfulness, and extent to which they agree with the speaker's ideas. They

- assess facts to determine if they are true.
- test the logic underlying speaker inferences to see if they are valid.

Good listeners provide emotional comfort or demonstrate respect for the speaker while disagreeing or critiquing. They

- offer statements that acknowledge the legitimacy of the speaker's emotional state.
- use "I" centered statements that begin by agreeing or acknowledging positives before offering specific disagreements or commenting on problems.

Poor listeners hear and understand but don't take time to consider the accuracy, truthfulness, and extent to which they agree. They

- accept information at face value.
- don't analyze the logic behind inferences.

Poor listeners ignore the speaker's emotional message or disagree or critique in a manner that demeans. They

- respond without acknowledging the explicit emotional pain or joy of the speaker.
- couch statements in other-centered language, fail to acknowledge positives or areas of agreement, and make comments that are overly general, not specific, or negative.

Critical Listening

Find and attend a formal public presentation that is being given on campus or in your community. Your goal is to listen so that you remember and can critically evaluate what you have heard. Be sure to take notes and record the main ideas the speaker presents. After you have heard the speech, analyze what you have heard. You can use the following questions to guide your initial thinking:

- What was the purpose of the speech? What was the speaker trying to explain to you or convince you about?

- Was it easy or difficult to identify the speaker's main ideas? What did you notice about how the speaker developed each point she or he made?
- Did the speaker use examples or tell stories to develop a point? If so, were these typical examples, or did the speaker choose examples that were unusual but seemed to prove the point?
- Did the speaker use statistics to back up what was said? If so, did the speaker tell you where the statistics came from? Did the statistics surprise you? If so, what would you have needed to hear that would have helped you to accept them as accurate?
- Do you think that the speaker did a good job? If so, why? If not, what should the speaker have done to be more effective?

When you have finished your analysis, follow your instructor's directions. You may be asked to write a short essay about the speech or to present what you have learned to the class.

Notes based on a lecture on listening

- I. What is listening?
 - A. Attaching meaning to what we hear
 - B. 50% of communication time is listening
- II. Types of listening (appreciative, discriminative, comprehensive, empathic, critical)
- III. Steps in listening process
 - A. Attending—focusing
 - 1. Get ready (physically & mentally)
 - 2. Resist mental distractions
 - 3. Don't interrupt (Make complete shift, don't rehearse)
 - 4. Hear person out (don't check out)
 - 5. Watch nonverbal cues (do they match words?)
 - B. Understanding—decoding message
 - 1. Ask questions (get details & clarify words & feelings)
 - 2. Paraphrase (content & feelings)
 - 3. Empathize (empathy, perspective taking, sympathy)
 - 4. Check perceptions

Notes based on a lecture on listening

C. Remembering

1. Repeat info
2. Construct mnemonics (e.g., Great Lakes = HOMES)
3. Take notes

D. Evaluating

1. Analyze facts
2. Test inferences

E. Responding

1. Supportive messages (state aim to help, acceptance of other, concern, availability to listen, being ally; acknowledge & validate feelings; encourage elaboration)
2. Disagree respectfully ("I" language, specific examples, points of agreements)